

Healing in the Changes of Time - Laudanum

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Laudanum is another panacea originating in the Middle Ages. It was created in the 16th century by a Swiss physician, philosopher, scientist, astrologer, and alchemist Paracelsus. It was actually an opium tincture. Paracelsus, who praised opium as “the most effective remedy,” found in his experiments that alkaloids in opium are much more soluble in alcohol than in water. He was amazed by its extraordinary effects, especially as a pain reliever.



Figure 1: Bottles with a miraculous drug called Laudanum. Paracelsus was convinced that opium was a universal and effective drug that would alleviate human suffering from diseases. Laudanum was probably created in 1527 and was recommended for every disease.

He called it Laudanum. He derived the name of this miracle cure from the Latin word *laudare*, meaning praise, praiseworthy, or “something to be praised.” Laudanum’s composition consisted of opium, crushed pearls, musk, amber, and other substances. It was of a red-brown color and had a very bitter taste, although the drugmaker described the resulting formulation as sweet. Over the years, its composition has changed. In later records in pharmacopoeias, ingredients such as saffron, clover, castor bean or nutmeg are already appearing. Sometimes more alcohol, wine, or different amounts of cinnamon, cloves, mercury, cayenne pepper, and belladonna were added. Laudanum was most often used to relieve and soothe various pains, gout, rheumatism, diarrhea, vomiting, to suppress cough, or to treat persistent cough, and also for “women's problems.”

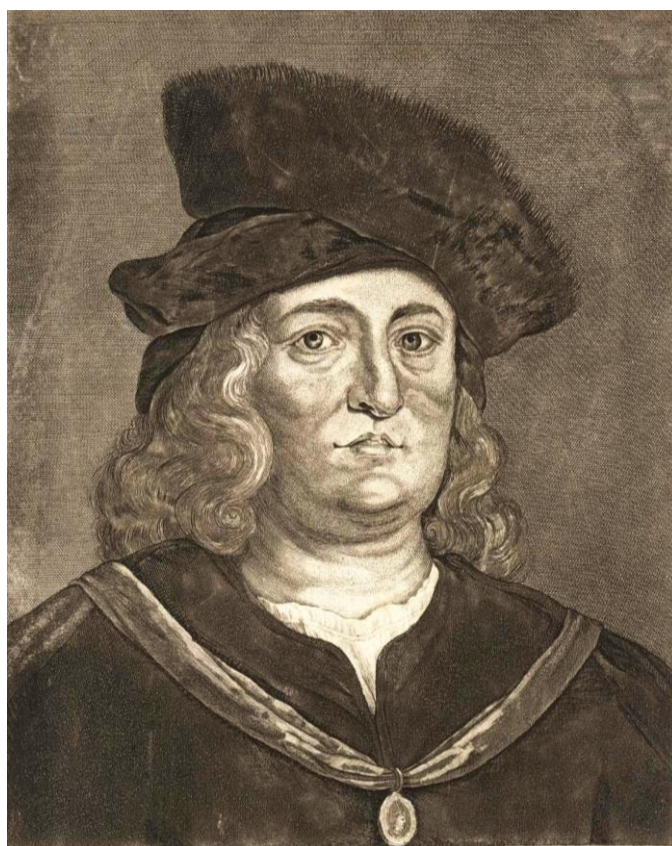


Figure 2: Paracelsus - philosopher, physician, alchemist, father of pharmacology. He was a well-known opponent of scholastic medicine, so he rejected the works of classical doctors. He publicly burned the works of the ancient physicians Hippocrates, Galen, and Avicenna, thus getting into conflict with the contemporary university college. Paracelsus was often suspected of witchcraft and heresy for his medical criticism.

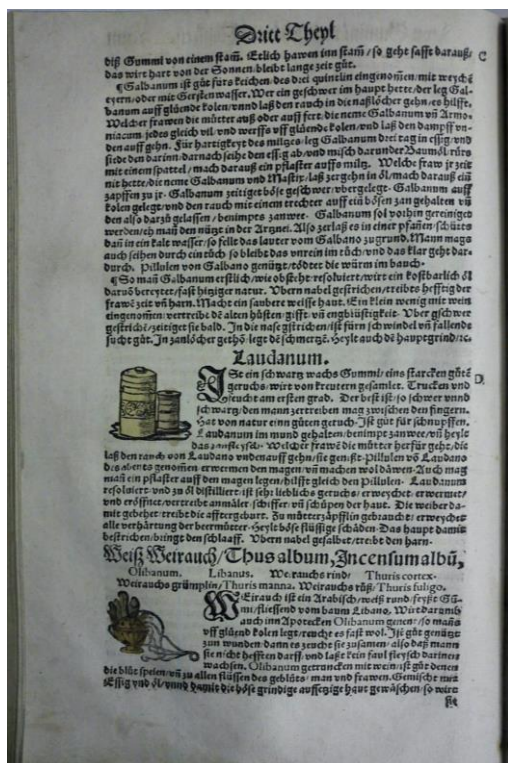


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Figure 3a: Laudanum in Adam Lonicer's herbarium from 1560.

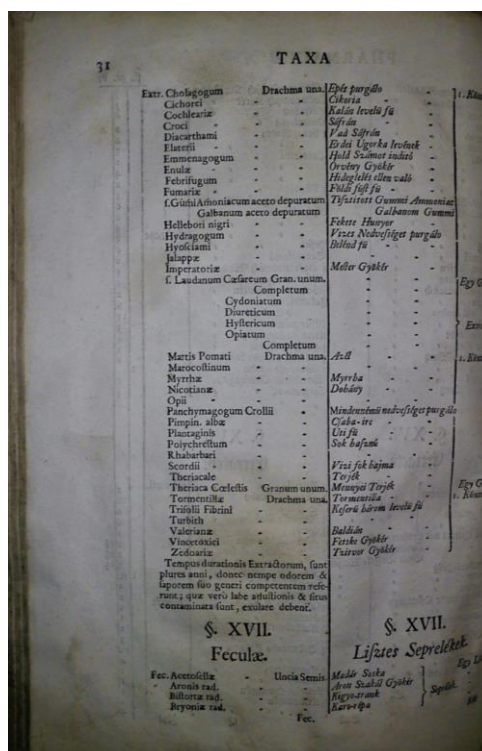


Figure 3b: Laudanum in the so-called Taxa Posoniensis from 1745, written in four languages

The demand for this miracle drug has increased, especially in times of raging infectious diseases and epidemics. It was a hope for patients with cholera, black death (plague), dysentery, or tuberculosis, and also for patients with mental and physical suffering. Even though Laudanum was considered a truly omnipotent medicine, it was available to all social classes. The use of Laudanum also had known side effects such as dysphoria, itching, constipation, but mainly addiction. Laudanum overdose has led to respiratory depression, hypoxia, coma, unconsciousness, respiratory arrest, and sometimes death.

Paracelsus (1493 - 1541), full name: Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim. He believed in the hidden power of nature. He gave diseases new names, classified them according to causes and manifestations. Laudanum was Paracelsus' secret aid. According to legend, he kept it in the hand of a sword, which he carried with him and spread the rumor of him that it was a gift from an executioner.



Figure 4: Physician Thomas Sydenham was able to accurately describe the manifestations of tuberculosis, rheumatism, scarlet fever, malaria, and typhus, as he based his observations on his patients at the bedside. He also dealt with feverish diseases and their treatment. He did not use venous drainage or induction of vomiting. He recommended sleep, light meals, fresh air, and Laudanum to the patients.

Thomas Sydenham (1624 - 1689), an English physician, is credited for the expansion of Laudanum in the 17th century when he simplified and standardized the effective drug. Although several versions of Laudanum emerged, Sydenham's was considered the best. Its name was *Laudanum Sydenhami*. It was effective against pain, cough, respiratory diseases and provided a deep and refreshing sleep. Sydenham prepared it from two ounces of opium, strong red wine, or port wine, saffron, cloves, and cinnamon. Laudanum was still a well-known and respected panacea in the 18th century. It can be found in almost every pharmacopoeia. In the 19th century, it was the basis of many other drugs or was added to other drugs to relieve pain, promote sleep, relieve irritation, or inflammation or against diarrhea. In the Victorian period, Laudanum was used by women for menstrual cramps.



Figure 5: The medicinal product Laudanum opiatum was also found in the first-aid kit of Rudolf II, which contained a selection of the most important drugs from the beginning of the 17th century. The manuscript list of the first aid kit dates from 1628.

Sources of illustrations

<http://www.thethinkersgarden.com/2016/07/odd-truths-paracelsus-rebel/#.WZNEkPFSDcd>

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aureolus_Theophrastus_Bombastus_von_Hohenheim_\(Paracelsus\).Wellcome_V0006587.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aureolus_Theophrastus_Bombastus_von_Hohenheim_(Paracelsus).Wellcome_V0006587.jpg)

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